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**Exegetical Miniatures and Rubrics in the Anjou Bible (Naples 14<sup>th</sup> c. – Leuven, Maurits Sabbe Library – Faculty of Theology and Religious Studies)**

Dutch original in *EZRA – Bijbels tijdschrift* 11 – 42 (2011), 65-74.

Initial miniatures in illuminated Bible manuscripts do more than decorate the first letter of a text. They also serve an exegetical purpose, giving specific meaning to the Bible book they start. The picture could be something purely conventional, similar to other illuminated Bible codices. But sometimes it is so special that it brings to light the manuscript owner's or illuminator's intentions. This seems to be the case in several places of the Anjou Bible. It would be worthwhile to compare the iconography and the content of all its initials to other Bible codices, to identify what is special about the Anjou Bible.

The rubrics – the words in red letters – inserted in the text of the Canticle of Canticles, (also known as the Song of Songs) in the Anjou Bible seem also to have an exegetical purpose. They refer to *dramatis personae*, the persons who alternately speak in the Song. They are known to have been used in ancient Greek and Latin Bible manuscripts of Canticles, but not always with the same meaning or purpose. Here, too, there are elements specific to the Anjou Bible that bear further textual examination. Here we will look at just two such examples, the initial H in Malachi, and the rubrics to the "dramatized" Song of Songs.

### **Malachi**

The Book of Malachi's opening miniature (fol. 234r) is not the customary and expected letter **O**. The Latin text starts with the words *Onus Verbi Domini ad Israel in Malachia propheta* – 'The burden of the words that the Lord spoke to Israel through Malachi the prophet'. Rather the text opens with the letter **H**. Everywhere else the initial letter is just the first letter of the subsequent text. Thus the actual text of Habakkuk, following the initial **O**, begins with *nus quid vidit Habacuc*. In Malachi text begins after the initial **H** with *Onus*, written in full. The illustrator deviates from the normal practice. Is this an error or was it done on purpose?

### **Fratricide or the Prophet's murder?**

The initial's illustration also poses a problem. In one sense the iconography contains the usual symbol for *fratricide*. Cain beats Abel to death with a club. Blood gushes. God seems to accept with open arms the lamb sacrificed on the altar. Abel has a halo; he is a saint, a martyr. In another, the image evokes the theme of *slain prophets*, e.g. the stoning to death of prophet Zechariah (in the Vulgate called Zacharias) by order of King Joash (2 Chronicles 24:20-22). The prophet had rebuked the people for their unfaithfulness to Yahweh. Zechariah, on whom the Spirit of God had descended (hence the halo), declared as he lay dying: 'May the Lord see it and take revenge'. The miniature would portray the Lord with indignant arms witnessing the murder.

The miniature's iconography appears to be a hybrid combining two biblical stories or themes, *fratricide* and *slain prophet*. Setting aside the Jewish or Hebrew interpretation, we seek an explanation for this in the Christian interpretation of the Old Testament, which we assume lies

at the basis of the Anjou Bible's iconography. From the beginning, in Genesis, the Creator and Redeemer is represented as Christ, with crossed nimbus. The Biblical Pantocrator is Christ.

Divinity in Malachi's miniature is Christ. The nimbus with cross is clearly visible. Martyr's blood flows over the earth and calls for vengeance. Christ proffers no blessing, but the threat of retaliation. Dramatically spreading hands and arms, he witnesses the fratricide. The image refers to Jesus' diatribe against scribes and Pharisees in Matthew (Mt 23:13-36; parallel Lk 11:49-51): "Woe to you hypocrites ... ye witness against yourselves that ye sons are killers of prophets ... Upon you will come down all the innocent blood that was shed on earth, from the blood of innocent Abel to the blood of Zechariah, the son of Barachias, whom you have murdered between the temple and the altar. Verily I say unto you, all these things will come down to this generation "(Mt 23:29ff.).

This raises the question whether the Zacharias in this diatribe is the same one as in 2 Chron 24. One was about 'stoning', the other about an unspecified 'murder'. Moreover, 2 Chron 24 dealt with a Zacharias, son of the priest Jehoiada. Here it is the prophet Zacharias the son of Barachias, 'author' of the book of Zechariah (see Zechariah 1:1). Historically speaking, these are indeed two different traditions. However, in late biblical tradition the two characters, the priest's son Zacharias and the prophet Zechariah, fused.

### John the Baptist

The question now is why the book of Malachi's initial in the Anjou Bible should use a miniature on the letter **H** to allude to Jesus' diatribe against scribes and Pharisees. To find the answer, we must turn to the figure of John the Baptist. To start with, the Baptist is the 'messenger of Yahweh', whom the prophet Malachi announced. When we disregard the insertion of the deuterocanonical books of Maccabees – as in the Anjou Bible –, *Malachi* is the last book of the Old Testament, immediately preceding the Gospel of Matthew.

Christians traditionally consider John the Baptist to be the last of the prophets. Matthew has Jesus say of him (Mt 11:10): *Hic est enim de quo scriptum est "Ecce mitto angelum meum ante faciem tuam "* – He it is about whom is written: "Behold, I send my messenger before You out ... " (Mal 3:1) The initial **H** in Anjou's Malachi points forward to the testimony of Jesus. "Malachi" – whose name in Hebrew means "my messenger" – is none other than John the Baptist, "**H**ic est ...".

But there's more. Matthew has Jesus call John more than a prophet. According to the final words of Malachi (Mal 3:23-24) the messenger paving the way for the Lord is none less than Prophet Elijah, who will come before the day of Yahweh. Jesus' testimony about the Baptist responds to this and takes it a step further. *Et si vultis recipere, ipse est qui Elias venturus est* ('And if ye will receive it, this is Elias, which was for to come') (Mt 11:14). At the Transfiguration, when Jesus reveals himself as the Son of Man, attended by Moses and Elijah, Jesus confirms his testimony: "Elias truly shall first come, and restore all things. But I say unto you, that Elias is come already, and they knew him not "(Mt 17:10-13). The disciples understood that Jesus referred to John the Baptist.

Luke also links the Baptist to Elijah. See Luke 1:16-17. When the angel announces John's birth to his father Zacharias, the angel tells him that his son will lead many Israelites back to the Lord their God, and will go before Him with the spirit and power of *Elijah to return the mind of the fathers to the children* (italics = Mal 3:23-24). The Fourth Gospel (Jn 1:21-23) has

the Baptist say that he is not actually Elijah, but, referring to Isaiah, is *the voice of one crying in the wilderness, Make straight the way for the Lord* (Is. 40:3).

The Anjou Bible's illustrator depicts the announcement to Zacharias in the Gospel of Luke's initial (fol. 262r). Zechariah stands with John's mother Elisabeth – both with nimbus –, beside the temple altar. An angel in the heavens – also with nimbus – speaks to Zechariah about the Baptist and Elijah.

The initial in the Book of Malachi anticipates John the Baptist, who, in the prophet's words, is the messenger, who will prepare the way before the Lord.' (Mal 3:1). He is Elijah, whom Malachi foretold for the end of days with a word of Yahweh Sebaot: 'I will send you Elijah, the prophet, before the day of the LORD comes, the great and terrible day, to turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the land with doom. '(Mal 3:23-24).

### *Prophetic Criticism*

Why is the reference to John the Baptist in the initial **H** and the image of Abel's innocent blood illustrated by the murder of the prophet Zechariah? John the Baptist is linked with the theme of the slain prophet through his father Zechariah.

The biblical story of the murder of the priest's son Zachariah / Zekarja (2 Chron 24:20-22) was transmuted in the late biblical tradition to the prophet Zachariah (Zech 1:1). This is particularly evident in the diatribe against the Pharisees, Luke 11:51. In referring to Zachariah, Luke omitted the patronymic 'son of Barachias', which distinguished him from the son of Jehoiada the priest in 2 Chron 24. This gives the impression that there is only one Zachariah, the penultimate of the Twelve Minor Prophets who was killed 'between the temple and the altar'.

The apocryphal Proto-gospel of James goes a step further. It presents Zacharias, father of John the Baptist, as a martyr, borrowing the prophets' words used in Mt 23 and 2 Chron 24 to describe murder. When, after the murder on the innocent children in Bethlehem, king Herod's servants come to Zacharias to ask where John was hiding, the father answered: "I am a martyr for God, take my blood. My soul is taken by the Lord, you have shed *innocent blood* (Mt 23:35) in *the front hall of the temple of the Lord* (2 Chron 24:21). Zacharias, father of John the Baptist, died a martyr's death, as did the Baptist, whom Herod, tetrarch of Galilee (Mt 14:1-22 and parallel) beheaded. He died in the manner of the prophets, sages and scribes who preceded him, sent by God's wisdom, i.e. by Christ himself, to the people of Israel, but time and again slain by 'that brood of vipers' (Mt 23:34, Lk 11:49).

Moreover, the Baptist's identification with Elijah is linked on the theme of *fratricide*. John the Baptist, like Elijah, preached repentance and conversion to prevent, as Malachi said, the Lord place the land under a ban (Mal 3:24). The initial **H** portends ominous divine words: *Haec dicit Dominus*. The miniature concretises the threat: "On you will fall the guilt of all the innocent blood spilt on the ground, from innocent Abel to Zechariah son of Berachia, whom you murdered between the sanctuary and the altar" (Mt 23:35). John the Baptist's preaching would prevent this calamity. "*Hic est enim de quo scriptum est.*" He it is about whom is written: 'Behold, I send my messenger ahead of you ..., to prevent Yahweh from striking the land with total destruction (Mal 3:1 and 3:24). Echoing the words of Isaiah: 'Make straight

the way for the Lord' (Is. 40:3 and Jo 1:1-23), John continues Isaiah's own liberating and encouraging mission: "Comfort, comfort my people. Speak to the heart of Jerusalem, and proclaim that its servitude is over, its debt is paid" (Isaiah 40:1-2). In van Eyck's Ghent Altarpiece John the Baptist, wearing Elijah's mantle on his shoulders and looking forward to the final judgment, holds open the Book of Isaiah at the passage *Consolamini, consolamini popule meus*, 'comfort, comfort my people'.

The Malachi initial in the Anjou Bible is an example of 'prophetic criticism'. The prophets repeatedly took the People of God to task for its unfaithfulness to Yahweh. Many of these prophets died a martyr's death.

In the initial miniature to the Book of Isaiah (fol. 174 v.), the Anjou Bible shows in how the Prophet himself levels a severe gesture at the tribe of Judah and Jerusalem, saying: *Vae genti peccatrici* – 'Woe sinful nation, people loaded with iniquity' (Isaiah 1:4). Jesus's *vae vobis* in the diatribe in Mathew 23, 'Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees ...' echoes the prophetic critique.

Similarly, the initial miniature in *Ezekiel* (fol. 203v.) shows Ezekiel confronting King Jehoiakim and the elders of the people with the causes of the exile. See also *Joel* (fol. 224 v.), where the prophet admonishes the elders and the people of the land with raised finger. Prophetic criticism is not the same as anti-Judaism or anti-Semitism. This is internal criticism arising from within the community of God's people. Again and again we hear an encouraging *Consolamini*. Repentance and remorse put an end to the time of servitude.

### Canticles's rubrics

Along with the rest of the Western Church, the Anjou bible presents the *Song of Songs* as a dramatized love story in which Synagogue and Church compete for the favor of the bridegroom Christ (fol. 159v). Sentences written in red (rubrics) identify the *dramatis personae*, such as *Vox ecclesie ad Christum* (Church's voice addressing Christ), *Vox synagogue* ('the Synagogue's voice'), *Vox Christi sponsus ad sponsam* ('Voice of bridegroom Christ to the bride'), and others. This type of dramatization is also found in Greek Bible codices, among them the *Codex Sinaiticus* (4<sup>th</sup> century), and in old Vulgate manuscripts, like the *Codex Amiatinus* (8<sup>th</sup> century).

*Codex Sinaiticus* does not apply the allegory to Church versus Synagogue, but to the relation between Church and its Bridegroom, Christ. The Latin *Amiatinus* and related codices, which do, however, apply this drama to the confrontation between Church and Synagogue, have the Synagogue speak eight times as the Church's rival. There we hear the Synagogue speak the familiar words *Nigra sum sed formosa* ('I'm black, but beautiful'), Cant 1:4. This is also the case in the Anjou Bible, but after the words *Nigra sum sed formosa*, the Synagogue is no longer mentioned by name. The opposition of Church to Synagogue is not continued, and seems inconsistent. This deserves further study.

The Anjou Bible interprets *Nigra sum sed formosa* as follows. When the Church expresses her love for Christ (*Trahe me post te* - 'take me with you'), the rubric says: *Vox ecclesie ad Christum* (Cant 1:3). Then bridesmaids call the groom by name (Cant 1:4: *Adulescentule sponse clamant nomen sponsi*). To which the Synagogue responds (*Vox synagogue*): *Nigra sum sed formosa filie Ierusalem ... Nolite me considerare quod fusca sim* ('Do not look down on me; a little dark I may be') (Cant 1:4-5a). The Church, seen as bride, then speaks the words

in the following passage, verse 5b (TM 6B). It addresses the bridesmaids (*Sponsa ad adolescentulam*) and says that its brothers' enmity, the 'sons of her mother', prevented her from taking care of her own vineyard. *Filii matris mee pugnaverunt contra me ...* ('My mother's sons were angry with me, they let me watch their vineyards. So I could not take care of my own vineyard'). 'My mother's sons' are the unbelieving Jews. Medieval mystical theology often portrayed the Synagogue as Eve, mother of the original Judeo-Christian Church.

The foregoing iconographic and exegetical features in the Anjou Bible are evidently not the only characteristics specific to this Vulgate codex. Study of all these stylistic yet exegetical features of this precious manuscript may help us identify relationships with or dependancies on other Latin Bible codices.

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2010